



UKRAINIAN  
FOLK TALE

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THE SEVEN  
ROOK BROTHERS  
AND THEIR  
SISTER



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Once upon a time there lived a man and a woman who had seven sons. Sad to say, the boys did not live in peace and harmony. They were always quarreling and fighting with each other, upsetting their mother and making her very angry with them.

One day the father drove to the forest for wood and the mother was left at home with the boys as usual. They angered her so much with their behaviour that she was at her wit's end as to how to deal with them, so in her anger, and without thinking she said:

"May you all turn into rooks!"

No sooner were the words out of her mouth than the boys did indeed turn into rooks and taking off, disappeared somewhere far into the forest. There they found an empty cottage in which they settled, and here they also suddenly turned back into people again. Nobody else lived with them, they were completely alone. Having settled in the cottage they began to work and keep house together and got along very well — taking turns at cooking and going out hunting as a group.

One among them was so clever that he made them all guns. They hunted and shot game for their daily meat and for their other food they cleared some land and grew vegetables.

Left alone, the mother cried long and bitterly for her sons. She had spoken out in anger without thinking that her words would come to pass. "If only one child had been left for me to delight in!" she grieved.

But it wasn't long after this that she gave birth to a daughter. Thirteen years passed since the sons had flown away from their parents. The little girl grew up and began to drive the cows to pasture. The other children, knowing that her brothers had been turned into rooks, teased and tormented her unmercifully, calling her a rook also.

So the girl gave up pasturing the cows and left home to go into the world in search of her brothers. Walking into the forest, she went far into its depths, so that turning back was out of the question. In her wanderings she came upon a cottage where lived the ancient mother of the Moon.





"Where are you from, child. Why not stop here and live with me?" said the mother of the Moon.

"I can't stay here because I'm searching for my brothers!" answered the girl. "Perhaps you have seen them and know where they are?" she asked, after telling the old woman the whole story.

"No, I don't know where your brothers might be," said the mother of the Moon. "Perhaps my son can help. Let's wait till he comes home and I'll ask him in what land your brothers live."

When the young Moon came home, his mother asked him, and he answered:

"I've never been there, but I believe that they live in the land where the Sun reigns!"

The next day the Moon's mother fed the girl and asked her son to accompany her to the Sun. They travelled along till they came to the Sun's house, and there the Moon left the girl. Here, too, lived the mother of the Sun.

"Where are you going, little maid?" she asked the girl.

"I'm searching the world for my brothers whom my mother cursed and turned into rooks, and who flew away from home never more to be seen," the girl answered. "Perhaps you know where they might be?"

"I have never heard of anything like this," answered the old woman, "and I'm afraid I can't help you. But perhaps the Sun knows about them. We'll ask him when he comes home."

When the Sun came home his mother immediately asked him if he knew anything about the brother rooks.

"No, I know nothing about them," answered the Sun. "I'm sure I've never warmed the land where they live. Perhaps the Wind knows?"

The Sun's mother fed the young maid in the morning and told her son to accompany her to the Wind's mother who, on her arrival, also fed her and asked where she was going.

"I'm trying to find my brothers," explained the girl and told the old lady her story.

The Wind's mother had also never heard of the boys, so when her son, the Wind, came home, she immediately asked him if he knew in what land the seven brothers

who had been turned from people into rooks lived. "Yes," said the Wind. "I do. I got caught in the rain and got my feet wet, so I took off my boots and hung my socks to dry by their cottage chimney. I've just come from there after a rest."

"There's a young girl here," explained his mother, "who says these rooks are her brothers. You'll have to take her to them tomorrow morning!"

In the morning, after the girl had eaten her breakfast, the Wind took her up on his back and carried her to the cottage where her brothers lived. They weren't home at the time—probably out hunting—but the Wind left her there, picking up his dry socks and going on to make his merry way around the world.

The girl looked over the cottage, saw a pot of food simmering on the stove, ate a bit of it, then crawled under the bed of the youngest brother and fell asleep.

The brothers returned to their cottage at noon. The youngest brother, whose turn it had been to prepare their meal, took the pot off the stove and noticed that some of the food was gone.

"Aha, my brothers," he cried, "it looks as if someone has been here and eaten of our food!"

"Impossible! Who could it have been?" the brothers wouldn't believe it. "We've already lived here a number of years and we've never seen anyone around besides ourselves!"

They ate their dinner and went out again. Another brother remained behind to cook their evening meal. Having made everything ready he left the cottage and went after his brothers. After he left, the girl, who had hidden under the youngest brother's bed, crawled out, ate some of the food in the pot and then hid again — this time under the bed of another, older brother.

When the brothers returned from the forest for their supper, the second brother, who had prepared the meal, also remarked that the food had been touched.

"Somebody has been eating it!" he told the others.

"It can't be! You're just imagining it!" said the third brother.

They ate their supper and went to bed. During the night one of them dreamt that their sister had come to





The brothers were assured that the girl was telling the truth and that she was indeed their sister.

"Stay here and live with us," they invited. "You can cook our meals and look after the cottage while we go hunting."

So she remained and did just that. The brothers were kind and generous, taking special care of her and dressing her in fine clothes as was befitting a young and lovely girl. At the same time they constantly thought about how they could return to their parents, but feared that if they did they might turn into rooks again.

So three years went by, when a tragedy happened in the forest. During their hunt one day the brothers killed a wild goat. But it really wasn't a goat — it was the daughter of the witch, Baba Yaga. And Baba Yaga swore she would have her revenge. One day when the girl was at home alone, an old lady came to the window of the cottage with a coral necklace, showed it to the girl, and asked:

"Young woman, perhaps you would care to buy this necklace?"

"Oh, I would!" answered the girl, for it was a very pretty necklace. She got the money and gave it to the old woman who took it and vanished into the forest. Then she put the necklace on, but no sooner did she put it around her neck, than it tightened up and choked her.

When the brothers came in for their dinner they found their sister lying on the floor. They immediately hustled around her, found the necklace, tore it apart, and slowly she began to breathe. Then they began to rub her body and in this fashion they saved their sister from death. When she was well again the brothers told her that she must not show herself outside the cottage no matter what happened.

All went back to normal. She continued to look after the cottage and prepare the meals while the brothers went out. A half-year went by, when that vicious old lady again showed up, this time with a bright red apple.

8 "Perhaps you'd like an apple? Here is a beautiful one," she tempted. Again the girl got some money





and paid the old woman. She took a bite out of the apple and choked on it, falling to the floor in the middle of the room. She lay there, only barely alive, taking but a short breath from time to time.

The brothers returned to find her thus and began to look about to see what had happened the second time, but could find nothing. With deep sorrow they built their sister a crystal casket with silver chains, but they didn't bury her. They placed her in it and hung the casket by the chains between two tall trees like a cradle. Their sorrow also drove them from the cottage into the world, wanting to return home, but how could they tell their parents about the tragedy that befell their daughter?

One day a prince, yet unmarried, came with his servants to hunt in the forest and got lost. They wandered about for days and in all this time did not see another living person. Quite by accident they neared the spot where the crystal casket hung between the trees and decided to rest there for the night. Looking up at the stars, the prince noticed the bright glimmer of the casket shining among the trees and said to one of his men:

"Let's go and see what that object shimmering among the trees is!"

Approaching the spot they saw that it was a crystal casket holding the body of a very lovely young girl. They discovered that she was not really dead for they could hear her barely breathing. The prince ordered his men to release the chains holding the casket and lower it to the ground. On releasing one of the chains, the casket somehow slipped and hit the ground with such a thump that the piece of apple in the girl's throat popped out. She sat up and told them all that had happened to her. Then she led them to the cottage and found that her brothers were gone and the cottage empty. So the prince took the girl with him.

Not long after their return to the kingdom of his father, the prince married the girl and they were very happy. But the prince had a stepmother who hated him. One day she said to the Tsar, her husband:

"Can you not see what your son has done? Found 11





himself some beggar maid and married her! Why should we allow them to continue living in the palace?"

The stepmother desperately wanted to get rid of her daughter-in-law, but could find no way to do it, for the prince loved his wife dearly and cherished her like the apple of his eye.

"If your son won't give up his wife, then we must get rid of them both!" she nagged the Tsar. "Order them to be shot or hung! If you won't do this then I'll not remain your wife, nor are you going to remain my husband!"

Now the Tsar was afraid of his wife and gave in to her every whim.

"Listen son," he said to the prince, "if you don't take your wife back to where you found her, kill her and bring back her heart and eyes as proof, I'll have to kill you also!"

The prince wept bitterly, but he took his wife and left the palace to journey to the ends of the earth. After them ran the palace dog. When they reached the forest, the prince could not touch his wife, so he killed the dog and removed his heart and eyes. His wife wept and said:

"If such is to be my fate then I will leave you and go alone to the ends of the earth!" And as she walked away weeping, she thought, "Now I'll go back to the cottage where I lived with my brothers and stay there. I must live somewhere for I'm expecting a baby soon."

Time passed and the girl gave birth to not one, but two children — twins. They were two beautiful little boys. One had a small birthmark like a moon on his forehead and the other a birthmark like the sun.

Years went by and the old Tsar and the stepmother died. The prince then became the Tsar. But he was an unhappy young man and sorely missed his wife. "If only I knew where she is now!" he thought, and blamed himself severely for what he had allowed himself to do.

Finally he decided to search for her, and taking a faithful servant with him, they went to the forest where he had left her. So searching they came at last to the spot where they had found the crystal casket. It was growing dark. The young Tsar remembered also that the cottage where she had lived with her brothers was





close by and decided that it would be a good place to spend the night. They discovered that it was occupied by a woman with two little boys. She had wrapped her head in a shawl so that it was difficult to see her face, but she greeted them hospitably, fed them, and prepared the bed for the Tsar and a place for the servant on the floor. She herself lay down on the bench and the children were put on the stove-couch, for they always slept separately.

A candle burnt in the cottage the whole night through.

The young Tsar slept very well on his comfortable bed, but his servant was not as comfortable on the floor, so that he spent a restless night, waking up often. While the Tsar slept his arm slipped out from under the covers and hung over the side of the bed. During the night one of the little boys woke up and started to cry for his mother. She hushed him quietly, saying:

"Don't cry son, I'll be with you in a moment. First I'll put your father's arm back under the cover or he'll get cold."

Now the Tsar's servant, who was awake at the time, heard this.

In the morning the young woman got up early to prepare breakfast for her guests. The Tsar and his servant ate and went out into the forest, returning to where they had been the evening before. Here the young Tsar stopped, sighed deeply, and said to his servant:

"How difficult it is to live in this world! You know, if only I could see my wife and know she is well, I would feel much lighter at heart!"

"And would you recognize her if you saw her, Your Majesty?" asked the servant.

"Yes, I would!" said the Tsar. "You know, that lady who put us up for the night reminded me of her very much."

"When you were asleep, Your Majesty," the servant told him, "your arm fell out from under the cover, and she told her little boy not to cry for she had to put his father's arm back on the bed."

The young Tsar was overjoyed. "You know what we'll do," he said. "Let's wait here till nightfall and then go back to the cottage again to spend the night!"





**СЕМЕРО БРАТЬЕВ-ВОРОНОВ  
И ИХ СЕСТРА**

Украинская народная сказка  
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In the meantime the young woman was very sad that her unexpected guest, whom she had joyfully made comfortable for the night, hadn't recognized her. He had gone back into the forest to return no more, without even asking her who she might be and how she happened to be living there all alone with her children.

However, in the evening, when the two men returned, she was overcome with happiness. She fed them again and bedded them just as she had the night before.

In a little while the Tsar deliberately lowered his arm over the side of the bed. The young woman came up and lifted it gently to put it under the covers. Here the young Tsar put his arms around her, embraced her tenderly, and begged her to forgive him.

And so they both returned to the palace with their two beautiful little sons. A huge banquet was arranged and everyone was invited. The merry-making and dancing went on for hours. The seven brothers who were once rooks wandered into the city at this time.

"What are you celebrating, a wedding?" they asked the merry-makers.

"The Tsar has found his wife!" they told the boys joyfully. "Look, how young, and good and beautiful she is!"

The brothers looked. Why, it was their sister! They came up and she recognized them right away. What joy! "Please bring our old parents here also, so that they may live out their old age in comfort," she told her brothers.

The parents came. Together they lived happily and peacefully to the end of their lives.



